



Communications Guidelines Virginia's Compensation Reform Communications Workgroup

Overview

The purpose of the Communications Workgroup is to foster an open communications climate for presenting information on compensation reform to the employees of the Commonwealth. Key characteristics of effective communications include candor and honesty. Individuals charged with implementing compensation reform should recognize the importance of the upward flow of information from the average employees, along with the downward flow from the various workgroups.

There must be a commitment to ethical communication. Language itself is made up of words that carry values. It is important that all communication relating to compensation reform includes all relevant information, is true in every sense, and is not deceptive in any way. When sending an ethical message, you are accurate and sincere. It is essential to avoid language that manipulates, discriminates or exaggerates.

The most effective approach for a business or organizational communications effort is an audience-centered approach. We must keep our audiences in mind at all times during the process of communication. Because we care about our audiences, we should take every step possible to get our messages across in ways that are meaningful to our audiences. The best way to do that is to try to put ourselves in our audience's position.

An Organized Approach

All communication relating to compensation reform has two basic purposes: (1) to convey information and (2) to produce in the audiences a favorable (or at least accepting) attitude or response. It is important to begin a message with a statement of purpose that prepares the audience for the explanation that follows. Make the opening clear and concise. An introductory statement that is cluttered with unnecessary information buries the purpose. The best way to write a clear opening is to have a clear idea of what you want to say. A good question to ask yourself is this: "What is the single most important message I have for the audience?"

The middle part of the communication is where you explain your point completely so that your audience will have no confusion or lingering doubt. The task of providing necessary details is easiest when you are responding to a series of questions. You can simply answer them in order.

A message is likely to succeed if you maintain a supportive tone throughout the communication. In the case of compensation reform, that tone is easy to continue in our messages because we have positive news for state employees.

Communications Guidelines (continued)

The conclusion of the communication should make sure the audience understands what to do next and how that action will benefit them.

Be concerned with clarity in written communication.

- Use short, precise words that say exactly what you mean.
- Rely on specific terms and concrete examples to explain your points.
- Stay away from slang, idioms, jargon, and buzzwords. Abbreviations and acronyms (such as TAC, EAC, etc.) may also lead to confusion.
- Construct sentences that are shorter and simpler than those you might use when writing to someone within your profession.
- Use short paragraphs. Each paragraph should stick to one topic and be no more than eight to 10 lines long.

Clarity is especially important when preparing materials for oral communication.

- Write for the “ear.” Remember that the information will be heard, not read.
- Use familiar and uncomplicated words. Not only will this help the presenter, but also it will help the listener. He or she has only one chance to understand the message.
- Select only the most essential facts and information.
- Keep the sentences short. Make sentence constructions simple and direct.
- Use a conversational style. The information should sound natural when read out loud.
- Whenever possible, use the present tense or active voice.
- Try to be aware of unintentional meanings. Clarify your true intent with repetition and examples.

Fundamentals of Grammar and Usage

Grammar is nothing more than the way words are combined into sentences, and usage is the way words are used by a network of people – in this case the people who use English. You will find it easier to present your message if you apply the accepted standards of grammar and usage. Without a firm grasp of these basics, you risk being misunderstood.

There are many handy reference materials available that cover the basics of grammar, punctuation, mechanics and vocabulary. There are many pitfalls when words are confused or misused. Even the best spellers have to check a dictionary for the spelling of some words. Electronic grammar and spell checkers can be helpful if you do not too heavily on them.